

SOVIET POLICY IX "WARTIME

town. These strict measures, while producing desirable results, could not, however, inspire more discerning Iranians with confidence in the publicized Soviet humanitarianism.

The Red Army was used as an active weapon of propaganda in performing certain services for the Iranian population. Red Army ambulances busied themselves distributing medicines and helping the people in the northern provinces; Red Army engineers occasional!; repaired a broken well in an Iranian village; Red Army units fought the plague of locusts in Iranian wheat-producing provinces. These actions, to be sure, could be explained as undertaken in the self-interest of the Soviet Union. The prevention of epidemics, the purification of water, or the extermination of locusts near the Soviet border could not fail to redound to the benefit of the Russians themselves. Yet Soviet publicity took care to depict these actions to the Iranian public as pure altruism.¹⁶

Charitable activities were not limited to the Red Army alone. When an earthquake occurred in the province of Gorgan in 1944, the Soviet Embassy displayed considerable generosity in presenting money and goods to the stricken population. On the other hand, Russia was glad to benefit from reciprocal generosity from the Iranians. Thus, for example, a Committee of Aid to the Soviet Victims of War was created in Teheran and in many provincial towns. It was presided over by General Ahmadi, the Minister of War at one time or another, and included the most prominent statesmen, officials, and aristocrats of Iran. The meetings of this committee were given tremendous publicity. The sums contributed by various persons were published, and participation in the work of the

committee or a donation to the Soviet cause was essential in establishing one's loyalty to the great northern Ally. This artificial enthusiasm was carefully fanned by the official Soviet representatives, and steps were taken to extend it to some special groups. In the fall of 1943 it was announced that a Zoroastrian Committee to aid the Soviet Victims of War had been established. The Armenian community in Teheran

pro-Soviet paper *Iran-i-Ma* wrote on Jan. 22, 1945: "During the three-year stay of the Red Army in Iran we became convinced that the behavior of Soviet soldiers was very correct and decent and that everything propaganda told about Communism was a lie. . . ."